

SCOTLAND'S CHAMPION

Daily Record

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EXCLUSIVE

ATOS'S £40m MISERY MONEY PROFIT

REVEALED:
Scandal of huge
cash windfall for
benefits company

By David Clegg

THE Daily Record today reveals the scandalous profit benefits axemen Atos will make from the misery of disabled Scots.

The UK Government tried to keep contract details secret but the Record has an official document that predicts the French firm will make between £28m and £40m in misery money.

FULL STORY: PAGES 4&5

NEW PUBLIC CASH

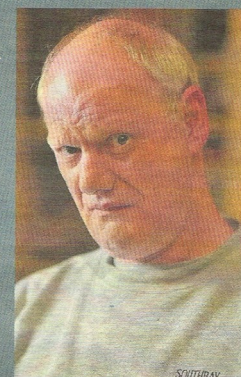
COLIN'S STORY

COLIN Grieve is living in fear as he awaits his Atos assessment. He is terrified of being forced into poverty if his benefits are removed. The 59-year-old from Selkirk has been unable to work for more than a decade, after being diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and suffering two mental breakdowns. He receives incapacity benefit but was recently told he would have to attend an Atos assessment. Colin said: "I keep reading about this Atos and I'm absolutely petrified."

"You don't know what's going to happen and it's playing on my mind."

Colin says he would be unable to pay for food or other essentials without his benefits. He worries that his lifeline will be taken away and he will be left to starve.

He says mental health patients currently living independently could be forced into residential care, creating a further burden for the public purse.



SCOTTRAY

JANE'S STORY



AYRSHIRE gran Jane Ramsay is facing yet another Atos assessment, only months after she successfully appealed against the findings of a work capability test.

Atos decided last year that the 59-year-old was "fit to work" even though a number of doctors had found that a recent hip replacement and crippling arthritis in her knees had left her unable to hold a job. Jane is also waiting on word over a potential knee operation.

She said: "I have been receiving disability living allowance and incapacity benefit since 2000."

"But last year I was told by Atos that I was fit to work and my money was going to be stopped. I'd failed their assessment, despite being told at loads of other meetings with doctors that I was unable to work."

"When I spoke to my GP about an insurance line, she laughed and said there was no way I could work."

"I was helped by the Citizens Advice Bureau to appeal the Atos decision, and I won in April this year."

JAMES'S STORY

JAMES Girdwood, 58, was badly hurt in a road accident in 1995 as he headed home from work at Yarrow Shipbuilders in Glasgow.

He suffered serious foot and ankle injuries and needed several operations. He has since developed a catalogue of other ailments including an elbow injury, arthritis, high blood pressure and a heart condition.

But DWP officials ruled James, of Muirkirk, Ayrshire, fit for work. Now he has been summoned to an Atos assessment and faces an agonising wait to see if he will lose his incapacity benefit.

James said: "I asked the DWP to explain why they think I'm fit to work, but they didn't answer."

"Instead I have an appointment with Atos to assess me. I have to go or they will stop my payments."

"I've been unable to work for years and I rely on lifts from friends to get me about. I also need that extra money from incapacity benefit."

"The assessment they've made about me is ridiculous. They are more interested in cutting the money than a person's health."



BONANZA FOR 'MISERY MONEY' FIRM

That Atos might profit by up to £40million is ABSOLUTELY DISGUSTING

By David Clegg
Political Editor

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THE Atos axemen are set for a £40million payday as they cash in on the misery of disabled Scots.

The Record has seen secret figures outlining the huge sums the French IT firm could collect from the taxpayer for their humiliating assessments of whether the disabled should still receive benefits.

Panicked Con-Dem ministers have desperately tried to suppress details of the new Atos Healthcare contract for carrying out the tests on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions until 2017.

But in a move that will lead to major recriminations in Whitehall, a dossier has emerged that outlines the full scale of the "misery money" Atos will rake in.

MSP Kevin Stewart, who obtained the figures, said: "That Atos may be set to profit by more than £40million is absolutely disgusting."

Titled "Atos Risk Management Plan", the dossier shows a predicted £40,535,679 profit from the £206million Atos contract for Scotland and northern England.

That would pay the disability living allowance of 10,851 people for a year, based on the average weekly payment of £71.84.

Atos will collect the colossal sum if they manage to put 15 per cent more people through their tests than broadly expected.

Even if the number of tests carried out is in line with predictions, they will make £28,636,419 by 2017 - enough to pay a year's disability allowance for 7664 people.

And if they drop 15 per cent below their expected total, Atos will still be in the money, making a profit of £16,712,945.

The Record has been telling the harrowing stories of Scots who felt bullied and harassed after Atos work capability assessments.

The tests, which have already been going on for years, have been slammed as degrading by doctors and charities.

The new contract will see two million disabled people across the UK tested to see if they should still receive benefits when the Con-Dems replace disability living allowance with "personal independence

IF ATOS PROCESS THE CURRENT NUMBER OF CLAIMANTS

2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
57,262,618	66,826,694	40,517,504	20,184,278	205,050,843
44,867,025	49,254,230	32,864,314	16,446,029	176,414,425
12,395,592	17,572,464	7,653,190	3,738,250	28,636,419

IF ATOS PROCESS 15 PER CENT MORE CLAIMANTS

2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
65,850,045	76,849,995	46,592,717	23,211,191	235,801,837
50,350,222	55,449,024	36,650,112	18,345,846	195,266,158
15,499,823	21,400,972	9,942,605	4,865,345	40,535,679

payments" and slash the welfare state.

There was uproar over the summer when Atos, one of the sponsors of the Paralympics, won £400million worth of contracts to carry out the tests in different parts of the UK.

SNP Aberdeen MSP Stewart used freedom of information laws to request details of the deal for Scotland and northern England.

The DWP tried to keep the vast Atos profits secret by blacking out the figures before sending the paperwork. They claimed, to Stewart's fury, that they were protecting "commercially confidential" information.

But the blundering bureaucrats failed to censor the documents properly, and the staggering sums became visible when transferred to another computer format.

Stewart, who says he has been swamped by calls from constituents terrified about the Atos tests, called the contract "absolutely disgraceful". He added: "That a company is making profit like this from other people's misery is terrible. The UK Government should hang its head in shame."

He called for an urgent review

of the "sickening" sums being paid out.

The revelations will heap more pressure on Tory Work and Pensions Secretary Iain Duncan Smith, who has defended the Atos contract.

Earlier this year, the National Audit Office criticised the DWP for setting performance targets too low, failing to adequately fine Atos for poor performance and not checking the accuracy of data from the company.

A succession of MPs have tried to find out more about the performance targets and financial penalties in the Atos deal. The UK Government have refused to answer the questions, claiming the days is "commercially confidential".

Official figures show that 40 per cent of appeals

against

decisions not to award employment and support allowance, largely based on the Atos assessments, are upheld. The figure rises to 70 per cent if the claimant gets help from Citizens Advice or other groups.

Atos said: "All our contracts are competitively tendered and subject to strict Government procurement rules."

The DWP said the contract was part of a "new approach, working with regional providers, for a service which best meets local needs".

They said they were making the system better by replacing an "over-complicated 40-page claim form" with "a discussion with a health professional".

And they insisted: "Atos were chosen in Scotland following the usual procedures for open and fair competition."



ANGRY
MSP Stewart

'That a company can make profit like this from the misery of other people is terrible. UK Government should hang its head in shame'

SouthSide Press

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NOVEMBER 8, 2012

Issue 31

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EVICCTIONS ARE 'SET TO SOAR'

Lawyer warns over benefit cuts

By JOHN MACLEAN

MORE than 200 Southside residents and their families were made homeless last year, new figures show.

And this week a leading lawyer claimed the number of evictions in the South Side will rise after controversial housing benefit cuts come into force.

Official Scottish Government statistics show there were 215 applications to Glasgow City Council's homelessness services in the South of the city from April 2011 to March 2012.

The 215 individuals and their families blamed rent or mortgage arrears or action by their landlord as their reason for seeking new accommodation.

But Mike Dailly, the Principal Solicitor of Govan Law Centre, fears the situation will get worse when housing benefit cuts for "under-occupied" homes are introduced next April.

For those affected, this will be mean the equivalent of a 14% cut in their housing benefit – equal to

£12 per week or £624 per year. Some families will be forced to move out of their homes, Mr Dailly said, but there is a shortage of housing in the social sector for them to "downsize" to.

He claimed: "This 'bedroom tax' will cause misery, stress and serious worry for many tenants.

"It will create nothing, apart from extra administrative costs and problems for social landlords.

"If we accept that there are not going to be enough smaller properties for tenants to downsize to, then this policy will lead to an increase in eviction and homelessness across the UK."

The Department of Work and Pensions estimate 660,000 people across the UK will be affected by these changes, which will only apply to claimants aged under 60.

Some 81% of those affected by the new benefit rules are "under occupying" by just one bedroom.

The DWP claim the changes



CONCERN: Mike Dailly

will help it save £980m over two years – but their estimate does not take into account the extra costs for local authorities and the NHS from 2013 to 2015.

Mr Dailly added: "We know the estimated cost of a typical homelessness case is £24,000. It can be as high as £83,000 for the most complex cases.

"The cost of each case to local

authorities and housing providers is £15,000."

Mr Dailly also predicted a return to the "Single Ends" of old tenement days. He said "If we look back at the 18th century in Britain we see that the poorest people lived in just one room.

"By 1911 half of the population of Scotland lived in one or two roomed homes while the figure in England was only 7%.

"Substandard, miserable living conditions were tackled through progressive social change. So it is incredible to think that the UK Government is going back to the future – recreating the conditions for the emergence of high-cost slum housing – by driving people into smaller, cramped homes as they tax the low paid and poor.

"Victorian values recreating Victorian housing conditions."

Govan Law Centre set up its award-winning Prevention of Homelessness Partnership project in 2005. To contact them call 0141 440 2503.

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Government parameters guide Atos

Opinion

John Mackintosh

THE Parliamentary debate on the work capability assessments (WCA) and Dave Anderson's column yesterday offer further evidence of how important this issue has become for Newcastle and the North East as a whole.

While my company, Atos Healthcare, has been delivering benefit assessments since 1998, the increased focus around the WCA introduced in 2008 has drawn us into the current debate.

With over a million people coming in for work capability assessments last year and 139,000 people claiming either employment and support allowance or incapacity benefit in the North East, heightened public interest is understandable.

Unfortunately, there continues to be some misunderstanding around our role, which is confined to conducting assessments within strict guidelines set by the Department for Work and Pensions, so they can make a decision on a person's need for support.

It's not our role to diagnose people. We purely assess capabilities. We don't make decisions on benefits. That's the remit of the Government.

It is our job to provide the best service we can for the Government and those being assessed, by meeting our contract's terms and delivering a compassionate and professional service, within parameters we're given.

The DWP has affirmed on numerous occasions - again during Thursday's debate - that we fulfil our commitments. We would not suggest, however, that we get it right every time.

We run a highly complex, national operation, with around 1,400 doctors, nurses and physiotherapists assessing around 15,000 people each week. We aren't perfect. We do make mistakes and we know that these have real consequences which we take seriously, are sorry about and learn from. We work hard to improve our service every day.

Checks and independently verified audits are integral, allowing the DWP to return assessments

they think are not thorough enough before a decision on entitlements is reached: 0.2% of all assessments are returned to us. Complaints are investigated and the lessons are applied.

Changes and improvements have been implemented, taking on board feedback from independent reviewers, medical professionals and the Government. Feedback from those being assessed about their experience of Atos Healthcare is generally positive with about 90% responding positively. We also listen to our employees, who deserve and receive our full backing. They do an admirable job, under challenging and sometimes hostile conditions.

Each assessment is tailored to the individual. If the information sent in and the questionnaire suggest advice could be provided to the DWP without the need for a face-to-face assessment, a request will be sent to a person's GP to ask for more information.

Just as a GP would, they will record the assessment on a computer to make sure the report we give the DWP is thorough and consistent. A personalised summary in plain English is included in every report. Tribunal Service figures show inaccurate assessments account for less than 1% of upheld decisions.

It is right that the people of Newcastle and their MPs should scrutinize this important government contract. Meanwhile, we'll keep striving to make our delivery as smooth and compassionate as possible, and welcome constructive feedback from any quarter that helps us do that.

John Mackintosh is the manager of the WCA contract for Atos Healthcare

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WELFARE

Take personality test or lose your benefits, jobseekers ordered

by Luke James

JOBSEEKERS are being ordered to complete a bizarre personality test or risk losing benefits.

Unemployed people must respond to 48 statements, such as "I never go out of my way to visit museums" and "I have not created anything of beauty in the last month," with answers ranging from "very much like me" and "very much unlike me."

Once complete, the test dishes out generic "strengths" which include "love of learning" and "critical thinking."

The tests were devised by Downing Street's behavioural insights unit which is championed by PM David Cameron and receives £500,000-a-year in taxpayer's cash.

In letters to jobseekers, the Department for Work and Pensions claim the tests are "scientifically shown to find people's strengths" and warn failure to complete the test "may result in loss of benefit."

But Steve Walker, who runs the Skwarkbox blog, exposed the exercise as a sham which delivers the same advice to jobseekers, regardless of their responses.

He told the Star: "It's about psychological manipulation of people and trying to, in some way, brainwash them into having an attitude which suits the government."

Mr Walker added that letters being handed to jobseekers with instructions to take the test online credit US psychologist and self-help guru Martin Seligman, who has advised the government, as

being the source of the test.

A spokesman for the PCS union said: "This government seems intent on inventing new ways to trick and punish people who are out of work."

"Which is incredible when you consider that there are 2.5 million unemployed people chasing less than 500,000 jobs and millions more looking for more work or a permanent job."

Chairman of the Respect for the Unemployed and Benefit Claimants campaign Richard Jacques said the "dangerous" tests effectively put unemployed people "on probation."

He added the campaign is trying to educate jobseekers "who aren't politically aware" not to "blame," bully" or "threaten" PCS union members working in jobcentres.

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EXCLUSIVE

By Joe McGuire

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HE'S the man who chased Labour leader Iain Gray into a Subway sandwich shop, occupies government buildings in his lunch hour and is a thorn in the side of groups such as the GHA.

But, in his own words, Sean Clerkin is a product of Margaret Thatcher, the reason why Alex Salmond is First Minister and leader of a Scotland-wide network of social activists.

The Glaswegian spent the day with this divisive city figure to discover the real man behind the political placards and bellicose rhetoric. Speaking over a coffee, we began by speaking about Subwaygate, which happened in April 2011, when Sean chased the then Scottish Labour leader around the city centre, ending up in a branch of the sandwich shop.

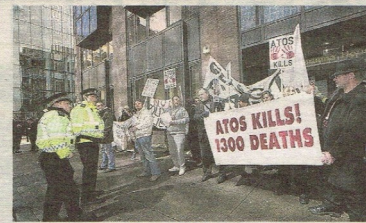
Sean reckons this one act determined the outcome of the 2011 election in the SNP's favour.

The 52-year-old said: "In some ways, Alex Salmond owes the position of First Minister to me. Citizens United Against Public Service Cuts torpedoed Iain Gray's campaign that day."

Citizen's United Against Public Cuts is just one of Sean's causes.

A committee member of Glasgow Against Aros and chairman of the Glasgow Homeowners' Campaign, Sean's targets vary from benefit cuts to the Scottish Government.

Pollock-born Sean says two things forged him into a shield for the



Demonstration... Sean Clerkin and his protesters outside the offices of French firm Atos, where they are demonstrating against the company's assessments of benefit claimants' fitness for work.



Working man's shield forged by Thatcher

working man - old Labour and Margaret Thatcher.

He said: "I've always been a socialist. I basically want to help ensure a wider distribution of justice and wealth in our society."

"This comes from, believe it or not, Thatcher."

"Ever since I had the milk snatched out of my mouth by Thatcher as education secretary at the age of 10, I've been very aware that social justice isn't something you can take for granted. It's something you have

to fight for. That's where politics really started for me. It's thanks to Thatcher that I stand here today."

Growing up, money was tight in the Clerkin household.

His father was a milling machine operator for Rolls-Royce, while his mum was a nursing auxiliary.

But Sean took politics in with his mother's milk, being taken on rent marches and anti-Vietnam protests by his parents.

When his dad fell ill with tuberculosis, Sean says the care

provided by the health service of old Labour was second to none.

The divorced dad of one said: "The welfare state looked after my family. It sheltered us in a council house and cured us when we were ill."

"At no point were we made to feel like a scrounger."

Coming out of university at 23 to a work environment ravaged by Thatcher, Clerkin's keen sense of social justice was further honed by eight months unemployment.

He won an essay competition that

granted him funding to go to college to study personnel management -

with the subject of the winning essay being how to treat people as assets rather than costs in industry.

After leaving college, Sean's career took him through personnel management jobs, including one that Thatcher ended with the privatisation of British Steel, until in 1994 he retrained in career guidance.

He said: "After British Steel, I wanted to get out of this business of overseeing cuts. I wanted to help

people and career guidance let me do so."

Sean claims he has moles everywhere, from government offices to housing associations.

It's this network that Sean says has led to victories such as blocking stock transfer in other local authorities and winning guarantees from Salmond that he'd act to protect disabled day centres in Glasgow.

With that, Sean heads off to a Glasgow Against Aros demo at the French firm's Cadogan street offices.

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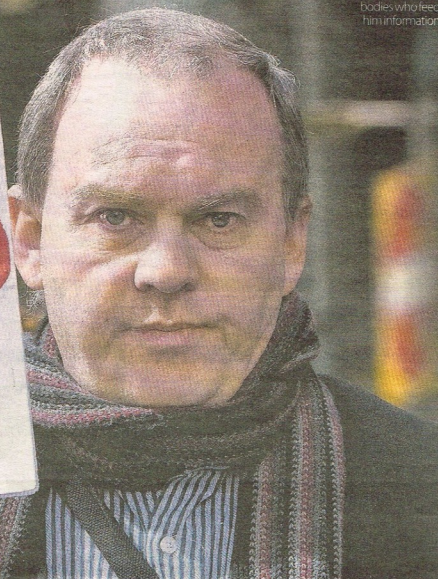
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WE CAN DELIVER



Fighting back... Sean Clerkin claims he has a network of mole in public bodies who feed him information

The protest goes on against Atos

At least twice a month, Clerkin leads his people in protest at Cadogan Street.

He claims that thousands of people have been so ill when forced to go for an Atos assessment they died while awaiting processing.

His own girlfriend Bernadette, who has suffered with neck injuries since 2004, is one of those anxiously awaiting the results of her assessment to discover if she faces the benefits axe.

He said: "Atos are not a fit and proper company to be involved with the Commonwealth Games, something that's supposed to show the best about Glasgow and Scotland. They are profiteering on the sicknesses and illnesses of people."

Council housing axe kills society

GLASGOW Housing Association has felt Sean's ire on many occasions.

His quarrels against Scotland's largest landlord include his belief they have potentially exposed people to asbestos and Sean has disputed some of the GHAs charges.

But his main issue is their houses are no longer owned by the council.

He said: "In the 1960s, in Pollok, you had teachers, factory workers, nurses, train drivers, binmen doctors, mechanics living in council housing."

"Thatcher's legacy has been to destroy this. Council housing became known as social housing and with this label came a stigma. So many societal problems today can be ascribed to this."

WIN: TICKETS TO SEE THE RAT PACK **SEE PAGE 16**

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Benefit claimants are now seen as other – less than fully human

Research suggests many of us regard people on benefits as part of an 'outgroup' who don't feel the same emotions. This is scary



'There are only a few groups considered to be both threatening and incompetent. These include poor people, homeless people, drug addicts and (you've guessed it) welfare claimants.'

Photograph: Mark Richardson.

[Robert de Vries](#)

The government's cuts to welfare benefits are causing real harm to a lot of innocent people. Nevertheless, remarkable numbers seem willing to support them, and all too ready to justify them with [extreme aberrations](#). You can probably put some of this down to our straitened times. People struggling to get by in their own lives will find it hard to sympathise with those they feel are getting a free ride. However, at bottom, a lot of the bad feeling towards people on benefits comes from the way we now see them as a distinct, separate social group. Different from the rest of us. Worse than.

On the face of it this doesn't make a lot of sense. People [move on and off benefits](#) throughout their lives (with most claiming only for short periods), and lots of us will have claimed at one point or another. Yet we still have this idea of benefit claimants as a separate, special sort of person.

This is crucial if we want to understand people's antipathy towards the benefits system. Decades of findings in sociology and psychology tell us that as soon as a group can be defined as separate, as an "outgroup", people will start to view them differently. We're all familiar with the negative characteristics people seem to identify with benefit claimants. They're lazy, dishonest, stupid, "scroungers", and so on. But there are also deeper, largely unconscious beliefs that likely have even more

profound and insidious effects. These have to do with whether benefit claimants are even felt to be truly, properly human in the same way that "we" are.

This idea comes from a relatively new body of work in psychology on something called "[infracommunication](#)". The infra just stands for "below", as in below or less than fully human. The term was coined by a researcher at the University of Louvain called [Jacques-Philippe Leyens](#) to distinguish this milder form of everyday dehumanisation from more extreme kind associated with genocide.

This is a fascinating (and quite scary) process whereby certain groups are not felt to have the same range of emotional experiences as everybody else. Specifically, while people are fine imagining them feeling basic emotions like anger, pleasure or sadness, they have trouble picturing them experiencing more complex feelings like awe, hope, mournfulness or admiration. The subtle sentiments that make us uniquely human.

There has been plenty of work with [ethnic](#) groups that shows this to be a real phenomenon. But crucially this tendency to deny people the full range of human emotions is strongest for low social status groups; particularly those groups that are both disliked and disrespected.

Not all low status groups are in this invidious position. Some – for example disabled people and the elderly – tend to be disrespected, but are also felt to be warm and unthreatening. There are only a few groups that have the dubious honour of being considered to be both threatening and incompetent. These include poor people, homeless people, drug addicts and (you've guessed it) welfare claimants. It is these [most stigmatised groups](#) that people have the most trouble imagining having the same uniquely human qualities as the rest of us.

You can try it for yourself. Imagine the most stereotypical "chav" you can. Imagine their clothes, their surroundings, their posture, their attitude. Now imagine them feeling surprise, anger, or fear. Easy right? Well now imagine them experiencing reverence, melancholy, or fascination. If you found that just as easy, congratulations. But I'd bet for a few of you it was just that bit harder. I'm ashamed to admit it was for me.

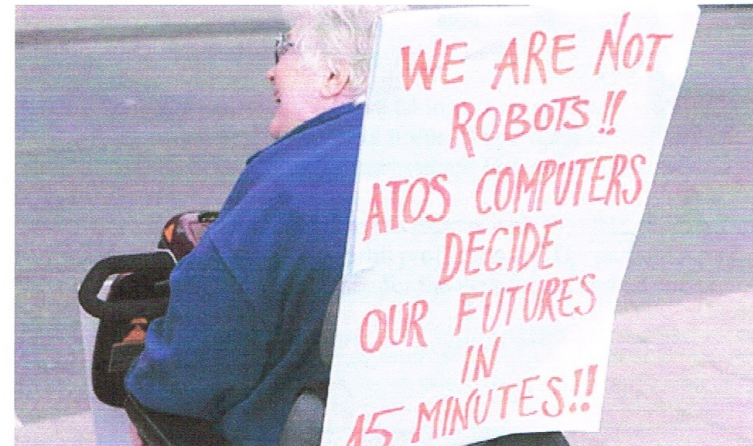
The reason this is scary is that it takes the "infracommunicated" group out of the warm circle of our moral community. If we don't think of them as experiencing the same rich inner life that we do; don't imagine them feeling things in the same way that we do, then we lose some measure of our empathy for them, and consequently our sense of ethical obligation. This would explain why people are so tolerant of the cuts – on an unconscious level, the people being hurt aren't real, full people. If this is true then fighting the cuts is going to be much, much harder than just [fighting myths](#) and misapprehensions.

- [Society](#)
- [Atos](#)

Atos subcontracts tests for new disability benefit to NHS

Number of NHS trusts reported to have been contracted to help carry out assessments for personal independence payment

- [Share](#)309
- [inShare](#)1
- [Email](#)
- [Ben Quinn](#)
- [The Guardian](#), Sunday 17 February 2013 20.08 GMT



Atos has been the target of protests by disabled people demonstrating against the fitness-to-work tests carried out by the company. Photograph: Julian Makey / Rex Features/Rex Features

[Atos](#), the company contracted by the Department for Work and Pensions to carry out medical assessments of people claiming [benefits](#), has subcontracted elements of the work back to a number of [NHS](#) trusts in England.

The subcontracting of the NHS by Atos in Scotland prompted questions last year from MPs over whether it represented value for public money for the state to contract work to a private company if the work was then outsourced back to the state sector.

A number of NHS trusts south of the border are now reported to have been contracted by the company to help carry out assessments for a new disability benefit, the personal

independence payment (Pip), which is due to replace the disability living allowance from 2013. The government aims to cut spending on the benefit by 20% over the next three years.

University College London, King's and York will deploy thousands of health professionals to carry out the assessments, according to the Financial Times.

[It emerged last October](#) that Atos Healthcare had appointed the Scottish healthcare provider NHS Lanarkshire's occupational health arm, Salus, to help carry out assessments for Pip.

Lanarkshire NHS will receive £22m from Atos to carry out the work until July 2017. Atos won contracts worth more than £400m in August to test whether disabled claimants were eligible for the new benefit.

Atos is receiving £238m for work in Scotland, north-east and north-west England, according to the Department for Work and Pensions.

At the time, the company described its subcontracting of work to NHS Lanarkshire as a "partnership", adding: "It means that consultations will take place where people feel most comfortable – in the heart of their local community – and they will be conducted by health practitioners that have first-class expertise in dealing with the needs of disabled people."

Atos said the supply chain model in Scotland was likely to be similar to those soon to be announced in England.

A DWP spokesperson said: "We are taking a new approach working with regional providers for a service which best meets local needs. It was open to NHS organisations to bid for a place on the health and disability assessment framework but none did so.

"We believe that it is right for Atos to partner with the NHS to offer Pip claimants familiar surroundings and experienced health professionals. The partnership proposed here demonstrated best value for money for the department and its claimants."

Stitching-up claimants is all part of the job, says former Jobcentre Plus adviser.

Last week Iain Duncan Smith met a whistle-blower who has worked for his Department for Work and Pensions for more than 20 years.

Giving the Secretary of State a dossier of evidence, the former Jobcentre Plus adviser told him of a "brutal and bullying" culture of "setting claimants up to fail".

"The pressure to sanction customers was constant," he said. "It led to people being stitched-up on a daily basis."

The man wishes to be anonymous but gave his details to IDS, DWP minister Esther McVey and Neil Couling, Head of Jobcentre Plus, who also attended the meeting.

"We were constantly told 'agitate the customer' and that 'any engagement with the customer is an opportunity to sanction'," he told them.

Labour MP Debbie Abrahams, the member of the DWP Select Committee who set up the meeting, has renewed her call for an inquiry into inappropriate sanctioning.

"I am deeply concerned that sanctions are being used to create the illusion the Government is bringing down unemployment," she said.

Sanctions pre-date the Coalition as a way of ensuring benefit claimants, who include the jobless and sick and disabled people on Employment Support Allowance, attend appointments and apply for jobs. But under the Tory-led Government, they have soared – to 897,690 a year from the most recent data.

Sanctions can last from a couple of days to three years, and leave claimants destitute.

Abrahams says that sanctioned people only continue to be counted as unemployed as long as they continue to sign on.

The DWP says most people who receive a sanction remain on Jobseeker's Allowance for the duration of their sanction and so will be included in the claimant count.

IDS and his department have repeatedly denied there are targets for sanctions.

"They don't always call them targets, they call them 'expectations' that you will refer people's benefits to the decision maker," the whistle-blower says. "It's the same thing."

He claimed managers fraudulently altered claimants' records, adding: "Managers would change people's appointments without telling them. The appointment wouldn't arrive in time in the post so they would miss it and have to be sanctioned. That's fraud. The customer fails to attend. Their claim is closed. It's called 'off-flow' – they come off the statistics. Unemployment has dropped. They are being stitched up."

For 20 years, the whistle-blower loved his job as an adviser. He says: "It was really rewarding helping people into work."

But he says the culture changed after the election of the Coalition.

"Customers were being deliberately and inappropriately targeted," the whistle-blower says. "I would see people crying in frustration, knowing they have been stitched up. Yet my Jobcentre was held up as a shining example to others. One of the district managers came to congratulate us. He said, 'I see these people hanging round the precinct, being lazy, drinking, taking drugs'. That was a very senior leader. Another said, 'These people are taking your money'. There was a total disrespect for the customer."

Advisers were told to "inconvenience" benefit claimants, he says. "I was told see them face to face, agitate them. 'Let's inconvenience the customer', they said, 'get on these people from day one'.

"They were treated appallingly, lots of conditions put on them. Many of them were vulnerable people with low self-esteem or coming back off sick. We were setting customers up to fail.

"If I do my job well and their claim is managed well, there should be fewer sanctions. Instead, good advisers were the ones who sanctioned more people. It was a daily mantra, 'Have you sanctioned anyone?'

I particularly remember a well-qualified father, he was desperate to work, with a wife and child to support. I was told to agitate him. They said, 'Tell him he's got to apply for factory and labouring jobs. Change his contract. If he doesn't take the jobs, stop his benefit'. It was a trap."

When managers refused to listen, he became sick with stress. "My body just gave up," he says. "I had high blood pressure, I was put on beta-blockers. I was in a state of physical collapse."

Debbie Abrahams, MP for Oldham East and Saddleworth, says Esther McVey had agreed to a sanctions inquiry, but has since made a U-turn. She says: "Just what are Iain Duncan Smith and Esther McVey trying to hide?

"This Government has developed a culture in which Jobcentre Plus advisers are expected to sanction claimants using unjust, and potentially fraudulent actions, in order get people off the dole. "This creates the illusion the Government is bringing down unemployment.

"The last thing Iain Duncan Smith and Esther McVey want is for this uncomfortable truth to be uncovered."

Last night a spokeswoman for the DWP said: "We take any allegations such as this seriously and will investigate.

"Our frontline staff work hard to support people off benefits and into work, and it's only right that we ask claimants to do everything they can to look for work in return. Unemployment is falling, there are record numbers of people in jobs and there are 600,000 vacancies."

MORNING STAR SAT/SUN JUNE 1 & 2
2013
MANUFACTURING

Thousands of strike as PCS

by Paddy McGuffin
Home Affairs Reporter

MORE than 5,000 Welsh civil servants walked out yesterday in a long-running dispute over jobs, pay and conditions.

Workers at the Land Registry, research councils and the transport, education, energy and business departments all went on strike as part of a three-month campaign by civil service union PCS.

It was the second day of

action this week, following a walkout on Thursday by culture department and museum workers.

And English Heritage workers are set to strike at the weekend.

There will be rolling strikes staged next week by workers at the Department for Work and Pensions and HM Revenue and Customs.

Delegates at the PCS annual conference in Brighton last week agreed to hold a national strike at the end of June if the

civil servants call for talks

government continues to refuse to negotiate.

PCS said it will set dates later and hoped to walk out alongside other unions.

General secretary Mark Serwotka said: "Today's action again shows the depth of anger that PCS members feel over the government's refusal to seriously negotiate on our legitimate national demands on pay, pensions and job losses.

"The government needs to realise this campaign is not

going away — they need to talk to PCS about these issues now."

PCS Wales secretary Shavanah Taj said the action told ministers that they need to address workers' concerns.

"Our members have been forced to take strike action by the persistent refusal of the UK government even to talk to us about issues like job cuts, declining real pay levels and threats to their terms and conditions."

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TRADES COUNCILS IN THE COMMUNITY CONFERENCE

Channelling the

THE huge interest generated by the forthcoming People's Assembly is a clear indication that thousands of trade union and community activists are crying out for the opportunity to unite into one campaigning force to resist the attacks from this rotten Con-Dem government.

We should not forget that several years of hard work by those engaged in the promotion of the People's Charter has laid the foundation stones for the assembly and the unified campaign vehicle that we expect to see emerging from it.

I pay tribute to all those who have played a role in getting us to this important point in the fightback.

Locally, across the country, much is happening, but much of this goes unreported by an increasingly hopeless national media that remains obsessed with the chattering classes, the Westminster village, celebrities and themselves.

The exception, of course, is the Morning Star which continues to punch home the message day in and day out and which gives a national press voice to all of those at

At a time of mobilisation of the working class against the savage cuts of this government the role of the local trades council has rarely been more important, argues BOB CROW



the sharp end in this grim era of cuts and austerity.

At this time of mobilisation of the working class against the savage cuts of this Con-Dem government the role of

the local trades council has rarely been more important as a focal point for the local trade union movement and our communities.

Whether it be the fight for

our NHS, the campaign against the Bedroom Tax, the battle for safe, publicly owned transport under the Action For Rail banner or a whole raft of other actions we as movement are engaged in, it is vital we have an active trades council network building from the bottom up.

I spend a lot of my time travelling the country, supporting RMT and community activists, and it is clear to me that not only is there a willingness to fight but there is a sense of urgency that we cannot afford any delays in pulling all the strands together to maximise our strength.

The People's Assembly is a vital part of that but so is the continuing call for general strike action that really throws down the industrial gauntlet to the millionaires in government.



Community-based campaigns

It is vital that the trade union movement effectively stands together in the interest not just of workers but of whole communities too, says KEVIN ROWAN

EVERY day there are reminders that working people are under extreme pressure.

Three years into the coalition government the signs are not encouraging for working people, whether employed or on benefits.

Austerity is squeezing any kind of quality out of the life of millions of people and despite the increasingly consistent advice of the economic commentariat the toxic Chancellor's response to the woeful failure of his policies to deliver growth and employment is to increase cuts and reduce public spending further — aiming to take a further £11.5 billion out at next month's Comprehensive Spending Review.

The macro economic plotting and policy-making at 11 Downing Street, the apparently tough negotiations with the so-called "star chamber," will mean very little to working people across Britain, but the consequences of these

behind-closed-door-decisions will mean further hardship and increasing deprivation for many.

The government has spectacularly failed to make any inroads into unemployment, especially long-term youth unemployment which is rising once again.

Where people are in work their wages are constantly squeezed as their pay lags behind persistent inflation, especially increasing costs of energy and food.

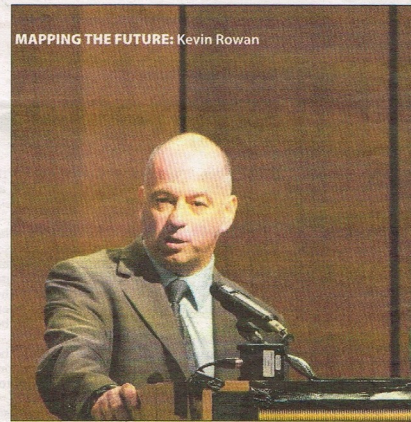
Workers on benefits, already among the most vulnerable in our communities, have seen their meagre income savaged by the Tories' acrimonious approach to anyone who needs any kind of help or support.

There are many workplace challenges trade unions are responding to. The growing use of "zero hours contracts," dismantling of employment rights, more barriers to employment tribunals, are making it harder for unions seeking to give workers confidence in the face of insecur-

ity and vulnerability at work and, of course, to reach the workers who do not currently benefit from good trade union

workplace organisation.

Trade unions are clearly doing much right in the workplace. The majority of working



MAPPING THE FUTURE: Kevin Rowan

tide of public anger

There is a real danger in not pushing the joint industrial work forwards and that is that the right wing will seek to seize the initiative.

In the wake of Thatcher's death we saw the calls from all the usual suspects demanding that a new raft of anti-union laws be pushed through in her honour.

Those laws would move on from all the current legislation that shackles the working class to a whole new level where strikes and unions are effectively banned in key public services.

It has the mark of the dictator and 40 years after the Pinochet coup in Chile we should not hesitate to nail those who want to ban collective action for what they are, the heirs to all those fascist leaders whose first step to control was to outlaw free trade unions and basic workers' rights.

But where is the political opposition to all of this?

The truth is that we now have four main bosses' parties pushing the pro-business agenda, the Tories, the Liberals, UKIP and, yes, the Labour Party as well.

I don't know why anyone is surprised that UKIP is picking up support and don't fall for

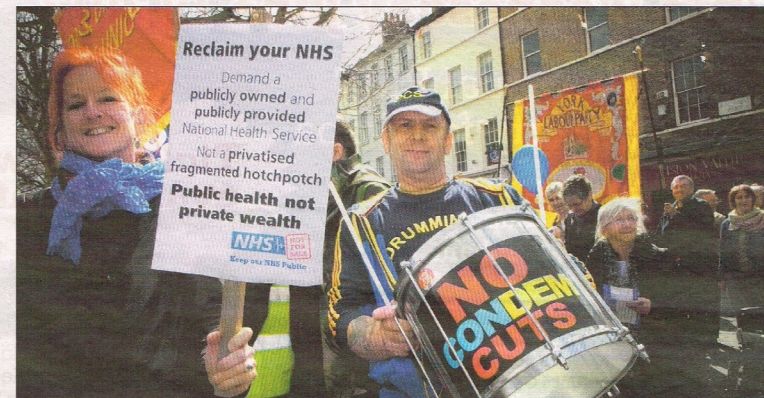
the line that it's just mopping up disaffected Tories which will somehow allow Labour to sneak in the back door.

Farage, a former Tory Party member and wealthy businessman himself, has cultivated a craven media that has bought into the line that he's some kind of outsider when he is in fact just another pro-business, anti-worker Tory who has grabbed his chance.

This of course raises the question of Europe and the hijacking of the debate on where Britain should be by the same old gang of self-serving opportunists.

RM has a clear position — British withdrawal from the EU. It is frankly ludicrous for whole sections of the left to try to duck this issue. The reality of the business and bank-driven EU machine is there for all to see out on the streets on Athens and Madrid and in the unemployment levels among young people that are now topping out at over 60 per cent.

Of course we are not opposed to the EU for the same narrow reasons as UKIP and its fellow travellers in the Tory Party.



Our opposition is founded on the principles of democracy and accountability and the knowledge that it is British "competition" law that is driving the plans to open up every corner of our NHS to the greed and profiteering of the private sector.

No-one can underestimate the scale of the challenge we

"No-one can underestimate the scale of the challenge we now face"

now face as jobs, living standards and benefits come under all-out attack while the gap between rich and poor gets wider by the day. The right wing see that as a fitting legacy for Margaret Thatcher.

Our legacy should be something very different — a militant, fighting trade union movement reinvigorated on

the tide of public anger at the rotten policies of this government of millionaires and with its foundations built on a vibrant and active trades councils network.

I cannot think of two better places to kick the action on than at the trades councils conference and the People's Assembly.

and actions need to be supported urgently

people think trade unions are an important defence against aggressive employers, are right to fight to defend their terms and conditions of employment and that they are the most effective force against unfairness at work, including in tackling unfair pay. These are some of the reasons contributing to the slight upturn

in private sector trade union membership reported this week.

Trade unions are increasingly playing a major role in community-based campaigns and actions too.

Whether it is mobilising opposition to the Bedroom Tax or other benefit cuts, building links with third sector not-for-

profit organisations that are under extreme financial pressures at a time when the important and valuable services they provide are facing ever more demand.

Or where there are foodbanks, now used by over half a million people in Britain on a regular basis, you will see a trade union rep or activist supporting, helping out, organising collections to keep the foodbank running effectively. Or

where there is a community response to the activities of the abhorrent, despicable EDL or other far-right organisations it is trade unions that are at the heart of campaigning and organising for fair and decent communities.

This role — trade unions in the community — will be celebrated and progressed at this weekend's trades councils conference being held in London.

The conference report and agenda is littered with issues and concerns that cover challenges to workers in employment as well as citizens in our communities — from international solidarity and European funding to a living wage and decent state pensions.

What trade unions have always appreciated — one of the key reasons why local

trades councils were established and remain important — is that there is no disconnect between what happens in the workplace and what happens in wider society. You can either have fairness or an abuse of power — right now we're enduring the latter.

At this moment there is a universality to the onslaught of the coalition government. If you're not milking it right at the top end of the earnings scale you're likely to be bricking it, whether you're out of work, low-paid or on medium earnings.

It is vital that the trade union movement effectively stands together in the interest not just of workers but of whole communities too. It is here that trades union councils can play a critical role, bringing together trade unions and community organisations at a local level to express the anger, frustration and, in many cases, the desperation people feel as their library, sure start centre, local maternity service or leisure centre is facing closure due to the coalition's stubborn, ideologically driven obsession with austerity at all costs.

Kevin Rowan is head of Organisation and Services at the TUC



MEDWAY **AGAINST AUSTERITY**

With keynote speaker **Bob Crow** (RMT). Speakers from **Campaign for Benefit Justice and Unison**. Discussing the fightback against austerity and building for the People's Assembly **7-8.30pm, Monday June 3** at Medway Deaf Club, 49/51 Balmoral Rd, Gillingham ME7 4NT (or Gillingham rail station)

Greater Manchester Assoc. Trades Union Councils

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Boss of cuts firm Atos gets £280k pay rise



▲ FILTHY RICH Breton

How does he get by on just £2,329,250?

EXCLUSIVE

By Keith McLeod

THE BOSS of Atos has been awarded a £280,000 pay rise after his firm helped to heap misery on thousands of disabled people who are deemed

fit for work.

The huge pay hike for Thierry Breton is in stark contrast to the thousands of Scots plunged into poverty after Atos assessed them as able to work under stringent government rules.

Atos - which earns £1.6billion in Government contracts - has been hired by the Department of Work and Pensions to assess disabled claimants.

In one case highlighted by the Record, Alexander Mackie, 26, from Stirling, who is registered blind and walks with a white stick, was graded fit to work.

Breton - chief executive and chairman of the French company - saw his 2012 pay soar by £279,992.

His total package of pay, bonuses and perks is now £2,329,250. For the same period in 2011, Breton received £2,049,250.

Last night, Tom Greatrex, Labour MP for Rutherglen and Hamilton West, who has campaigned for reform of the Work Capability Assessment, said: "Many who have been through the indignity of the failing Atos test will be sickened to see that the chief executive was rewarded with a hike in his pay and bonus.

"It is high time the Tory Minister for Atos, Mark Hoban, got a grip and fundamentally reformed the assessment so it helps those who can work, not hounds those who can't."

Meanwhile, a former Atos nurse has told of her "disgust" at the rise.

Joyce Drummond from Glasgow said she was forced to "trick sick people out of their benefits".

She added: "Atos went by the philosophy that if you had a finger and could push a button, then you could work. For this to happen when so many more people are now suffering greater hardship is hard to take."



BY BIRMINGHAM AGAINST THE CUTS | SEPTEMBER 12, 2013 · 5:17 PM

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Sparkhill Job Centre Closed Yesterday After Sanctioned Claimant Smashes Windows



Sparkhill Job Centre was closed today after five windows were smashed by a claimant who it appears had been sanctioned by an advisor at the centre. No staff were hurt in the attack, which highlights the effect on people of the savage sanctions regime put in

place by Iain Duncan-Smith and the Tories in charge of the DWP. This is far from the only time a desperate claimant has been placed in a position where the only response they have is one of anger or pain. Last year a claimant set themselves on fire outside Selly Oak job centre, and staff at JCPs have been given training to deal with suicidal claimants.

A Birmingham PCS Member told us

Sparkhill jobcentre management are renowned for their effort to get DMA [sanction referrals], They recently started opening their office early and it's generally believed this is to catch out customers so they can be sanctioned. We hear that staff are very unhappy in the office

In October, the DWP increased the length of sanctions, raising the minimum sanction level from 1 week to 4 weeks and the maximum from 3 months to 3 years. Sifa Fireside, a local charity working with homeless people, say that housing benefit is increasingly suspended when job centres sanction claimants. It shouldn't be stopped and if you are sanctioned and find your housing benefit claim suspended, you need to file a Nil Income claim to get it back. Sadly many people are unaware of their rights and having been told their benefits will be stopped, think this also means housing benefit, and find themselves accruing arrears or even being made homeless.

Sanctions are supposed to be applied to people who are not doing enough to find work, but in practice there is an increasingly long list of sanctions being applied to people in ridiculous circumstances, such as missing an appointment because they were at a job interview, or

having money stopped for 3 months because they were five minutes late for an appointment.

Staff at the job centre face a targets regime, whereby if they aren't handing out enough sanctions this will count against them in their performance reviews. [Locally, one job centre even had an easter egg as a reward/incentive for the advisor who handed out the most sanctions.](#)

Coming down from the top is a culture and language that emphasises the use of sanctions to “incentivise” claimants into finding work, saying that sanctions are a good and helpful thing. Increasingly advisors are buying into this culture and a sales type, target driven culture is creeping in. No longer will job centres be about helping people to find work. Instead they are about driving people into poverty through sanctions or unpaid work through workfare.

The sanctions regime is driving people to the edge, where actions like this become the only way they feel they can strike back against the regime that has just meant that they have no money for food, heating, clothes or travel for as much as three years. With [unemployment continuing to rise in the West Midlands](#), the prospect of finding work is increasingly distant. As Universal Credit and the Claimant Commitment are slowly rolled out, [people in part time or low paid work will also find themselves caught up in this nightmare.](#)

We need to act to stop it – from inside the job centre, PCS and advisors must take strong action against the management who are imposing these regulations and seeking to create a culture where they are used and abused as much as possible. From outside the job centre, claimants should come together to help each other deal

with the bullshit that they face every day, with a group like the [Birmingham Claimants' Union](#). Everyone else can be involved with us, [DPAC](#), [Communities Against the Cuts](#), [Birmingham Benefit Justice Campaign](#) or other groups campaigning and fighting for a decent social security system that ensures dignity and a basic standard of living for everyone.

WELFARE

Independent report savages Tory work fitness assessments

Civil servants' union PCS also opposes them, claiming they not designed to support people into employment, but to cut their benefit entitlement.

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka said: "No-one joined the employment service to administer a system designed to harass people and take benefits away.

"Our members want to support people into work and claim the benefits to which they are entitled. But these tests are not designed to help people and they should be scrapped."

The union says there is

mounting anecdotal evidence to show that people are being found "fit for work" and so denied employment support allowance and put onto job-seeker's allowance (JSA).

They are then denied JSA because they are not able to start work or meet the benefit's requirements, the union contends.

Sanctions for disabled people claiming ESA have increased by 156 per cent in the last year.

Disabled People Against Cuts was also not convinced by the latest raft of tweaks presented yesterday.

Spokeswoman Linda Burnip said: "This again is the stuff of fantasy.

"The only way to remedy what's gone wrong is to scrap the system totally and start again with a system that is ground in the NHS."

Disabled People's Minister Mike Penning was resolute in his praise however.

He said: "We welcome the valuable recommendations Dr Litchfield provides in the fourth review to make the work capability assessment fairer, more accurate and more transparent."

ryanfletcher@peoples-press.com

Undercover at the Jobcentre

May 19, 2015 by

Originally posted on [Guerilla Policy](#)

I asked the Jobcentre to let me have work experience there so I could dig up some dirt on the DWP. I did the work experience in another JCP in a different area from 9th March 2015 to 26th March 2015. All names are changed.

Alarm bells started to ring before I'd even started the placement. As I read the training material I overheard a man getting referred to the decision-maker for not applying for jobs. For the first job, there was no bus to get there on time. The other job he didn't apply for required qualifications he didn't have.

At about 10:15 on the first day of my work experience (Tuesday 10th March 2015) administrator Pammy said shows like Benefits Britain make her angry because those programmes depict JCP staff as "ogres" but it's the benefits claimants who are lazy. "They were sanctioned for a reason," she kept saying. Pammy said the show had portrayed a lone mum with three kids who was sanctioned and now dependent on a food bank. The woman said she was feeding her kids out of the freezer but didn't have enough frozen food to feed them. Pammy called her "lazy" and said she should "buy fresh food then" and that she obviously "has an attitude problem."

During my time in the Jobcentre I saw numerous examples of staff insensitivity towards ESA claimants and customers who were ill. An ESA claimant came in asking why he hadn't been paid. It turned out that his benefits had been stopped because he hadn't got a 'sick line' (note of unfitness for work) from his GP to prove he was still unfit for work. In response to my question about why he was on ESA, Pammy said he might be depressed. She said this is a "lazy attitude" but that now his benefit is stopped then he'll go because he wants benefits. She kept repeating this point, convinced that benefits were the only thing that motivated depressed people (or Jobcentre customers generally).

Another morning, a JSA claimant told me she was now sanctioned and applying for hardship funds. She'd been ill and missed a Jobcentre appointment. She had phoned the doctor and went to get sick note the next day but her GP wouldn't give her one because they didn't see her the day she was ill, so she was sanctioned.

A man who was claiming JSA came into the Jobcentre to explain that he didn't sign-on on Friday because he went to a funeral. Pammy said he would "probably" be referred to a decision-maker and maybe he'd get sanctioned. She also criticised him for waiting until 1pm the next working day (Monday) to inform the Jobcentre instead of telling them on Friday, the day of the funeral.

G4S security guard ('Customer Care Officer') Bob pointed out a customer to me and claimed he was a lost cause. He said some claimants would "like you to think [they're looking for work]" but they aren't, and he "will never get a job, who would hire him, would you give him a job?" Bob then suggested "They should just be wiped out, we shouldn't have to deal with them".

Advisor Sheryl explained the problems people face when they actually get a job. Now people don't get Labour's job grant and their rent paid for four weeks to tide them over when they get a job. She said Iain Duncan Smith scrapped it so people would welcome his Universal Credit because they would be better off with UC than the current situation. Her claimants borrowed from family and friends to get through the first month until their first wage. Sheryl also said that whenever there's a new claim for JSA, the Jobcentre phones the claimant's previous employer to check if they were sacked or if they chose to leave. Either one could mean you are not entitled to JSA until six months later. It depends if the Jobcentre think you had a good reason to leave. I asked how they can live, she said "Food banks or they borrow from family and friends."

Manager Mark told me that once a week all the work coaches have a "case conference" to discuss jobseekers and what to do to them. And another advisor, Abby, confirmed that people get sanctioned in this Jobcentre every day. She described claimants as "idiots". "We shouldn't have to deal with them, they should just get automatic payments," she said. "It's a something for nothing culture." Echoing Pammy, she described jobseekers as having an attitude problem and joked, "It's the supermoon bringing them out, they'll get calmer after the eclipse."

These are just a couple of incidents out of many similar comments from staff. It turns out that DWP culture is actually worse than I thought, and what I didn't expect is the fact that all staff members, not just advisors, feel the same way. I've written an ebook about what I saw called *Jobcentre: Confidential*, due to be released on Amazon in the next couple of weeks.